

{As prepared for delivery}

**Address To Rural Development
Employees
Jefferson Auditorium
August 19, 2002**

- **Thank you Mr. Secretary.**
- **I appreciate all of the support you have given to Rural Development and me. And I thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to be with us.**
- **Ladies and Gentleman, Good Afternoon. I thank everyone for taking time out of your busy schedule to join me here in Jefferson Auditorium and in the field via our video broadcasting hook-up.**
- **I want to use this time not only to introduce myself, but also to share with you some of my vision of what I hope we will be able to accomplish, as a team, for rural communities and regions across this country.**

- **Let me first say how much I personally appreciate everything that Mike Neruda and his staff have done on behalf of Rural Development during the past year. Mike has done a fine job in keeping the Rural Development ship afloat through this transition.**
- **I appreciate it very much and I know that you all do as well. So please join me in expressing our appreciation for his efforts.**

Appointment By President Bush

- **On August 6th, I was appointed Under Secretary by President Bush. I am honored and quite frankly, humbled by President Bush's appointment of me to Rural Development. I deeply appreciate the unfailing support he, the Secretary, and the Deputy have given me during this arduous nomination process.**

- **However, the President, by his action, signaled his recognition of the need to address critical rural issues. In order to implement the new programs and initiatives of Rural Development, the management team needed to be completed. The President saw to it that it is.**
- **They say that elephants give birth after a VERY long gestation, but THIS birth has exceeded all expectations! However, the confirmation process is a good one, and it is to be respected.**

Introduction of Who I am

- **During these past months, I have gotten to know many of the staff here in Washington. But for those of you who do not know me, allow me to introduce myself. (And I hope that you will take time to introduce yourself to me as well.) It is a privilege and honor to meet you.**

- **I was born and raised in rural Cherokee County, Iowa, as one of nine children and grand children. After graduation from college, military service, and a position with the National Assessment of Educational Progress, I chose to return home to the family farm, effectively becoming the fourth generation of our family to be engaged in agriculture.**
- **The decision to return rose out of a love for Rural America and farming: at the time, the horizons of agriculture were limitless, and extremely enticing for a young entrepreneur.**
- **My new bride Ann, who is back in Iowa today, and I raised 2 children and had an interesting and full life in rural America, but it has not been without trial.**

The State of Rural America

- **In the 70's – The sky was the limit – Enthusiasm, Foreign markets and Infectious time. Food demand was growing**

- **We have watched small towns die, and economic opportunity wither. The farm crisis of the 80's dealt a significant blow to the rural landscape.**
- **But now, we – all of us --, I have been given the charge by the President to help create an environment conducive to revitalizing this precious landscape.**
- **It is an ongoing and exciting challenge with many opportunities to make a lasting difference.**
- **We cannot afford to sit idly and watch small towns and rural areas deteriorate.**
- **As you know, the economic picture has changed in rural America. The population has declined and is aging, services are limited or unavailable, infrastructure is deteriorating, and health care access is difficult.**

- **Yet, the fact is people move to opportunity. We must use our tools to encourage entrepreneurs to seek out and create these opportunities for economic and social growth in rural America.**
- **I know from personal, day-to-day experience that we have a great charge to keep. We must be dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life in rural America. This will require new and innovative solutions to the problems inherent in rural life. (Although some of these may be whoppers – most likely they will be small --- risky and take patience.)**

New Technologies

- **A small example may serve to put all of this into perspective. As a resident of Marcus, IA, if our family wished to watch a movie, we had several choices.**
 1. **Drive 100 miles round trip to the nearest metropolitan area to watch the newest releases;**

- 2. Drive 30 miles roundtrip to rent a movie chosen from a poorer selection (no Blockbuster video here!);**
 - 3. Choose to have a premium movie channel installed on cable TV, watching whatever was being shown.**
- Compare this to the access available to an urban citizen. However, through new and innovative ideas, the same choices that are available to urban citizens can be available to rural ones as well.**
 - An innovative solution to the movie access problem is now available. Customers with access to a computer and Internet may go online, select up to 25 movies, and is able to receive by mail as many per month as they desire.**
 - The cost is approximately similar to the amount we paid for a premium cable channel, and the choices are nearly limitless.**

- **The customer in rural America can now have the same access to movie entertainment that his urban cousin has taken for granted.**
- **I'm sure all of you are going to quit going to Blockbuster and rush to find this service, but that is not my point -- It is, instead, that someone was creative and used the technology available to build a viable business.**
- **And along with a successful business, the quality of life of the average citizen has been improved. You have the ability to foster the creation of new ideas for improving rural America, and I hope you will join with me in exploring them.**
- **Bringing modern technology to rural homes and businesses is not the only focus that we must address, it is also important to the work that you do everyday.**

- **I strongly believe that through the use of innovative technologies we can more efficiently and more directly assist those that we serve. This includes both our internal and external customers.**
- **The event here today, is an example of how we can use modern technology to bridge the gap created by geography. The very fact that many of you are watching this while at your desk, is a positive and monumental step forward for Rural Development as a whole. (Nearly 7,000 of you may be participating in this event at a cost of less than a \$1.50. That's remarkable.)**
- **We must continue to improve on these services for future use, but all the same, it is an important step forward.**
- **Thank you Taylor Oldroyd and Tim McNeilly.**

Our Challenge for the Future

- **It is our challenge to look beyond today and envision better ways to work with America's rural communities. We must work with them to enable them to bring new hope and economic life to their communities.**
- **I strongly believe that we should become -- what I call -- “gracious enablers” in rural America. Our mission at Rural Development is an important mission -- it is one of opportunities and of hope.**
- **We must work aggressively to implement the Farm Bill and the goals of the Administration. But as we do so, we must remember to be compassionate, humble, and good stewards of the resources and people in our charge.**
- **Together we can create an era in rural America where those looking for opportunities of prosperity, will look no further than the small towns and villages that we serve.**

- **Rural Americans are resilient and they can be the pioneers to the 21st Century as they were to the 20th.**
- **This is an exciting challenge. I believe passionately in rural America and its opportunities. I hope that you will join me in this exciting journey. Let's work together and make a difference.**

Closing

- **Let me close by saying that after an extended period of transition we have the full Rural Development leadership team in place. It is a team that I am pleased to join and it will be a strong team.**
- **This leadership team consists of Deputies Mike Neruda and Gilbert Gonzalez; Administrators Hilda Legg, Art Garcia, John Rosso, Interim-Director Norman Reed at the Office of Community Development, and Deputy Administrator for Operations and Management, Sherie Hinton-Henry. The team believes in you and believes in what you do!**

- **In that vein I say to each of you that I commit this team to administer all our programs and policies fairly, equitably, and honorably. If deficiencies do exist in our programs and policies, I will use the full force of this office to ensure equity and fairness – for all our customers and for all our associates.**
- **It is the right thing to do, it is what I believe, and I will tolerate nothing less.**
- **And finally, I exhort each of you to recommit yourselves to working efficiently and cooperatively across all mission areas. Let us together convert our beliefs in and passions for rural America into the opportunities for success these rural communities and areas so desperately desire and clearly deserve.**
- **Thank You!**